

Extreme weather conditions and school closure

6 January 2010

Dear Parents / Guardians

I thought I should write to explain the reasons for the recent school closures just before Christmas on Friday 18th December and today, Wednesday 6th January 2010.

You will appreciate that any decision to close the school is not taken lightly but it has to be based on the health and safety of staff and students. The decision to close the school rests with the headteacher and I take this decision only following full consultation with the Chair of Governors, senior colleagues and the site team, as well as heeding advice from the local authority and consultation with fellow headteachers in the town.

The health and safety issues arise in terms of how staff and students get to and from school and then the conditions on the school site itself in terms of pathways and access to facilities. I need to feel that it is safe to ask staff to drive to school and that parents and carers can also get their children to school safely. I also have to consider what the school-day will be like, to see whether students and staff can move around our large, open site safely and will be able to get home safely at the end of the day. Of course, if sufficient staff cannot get into school then that also represents a major problem in supervising students and providing lessons. At Vandyke well over half of our teachers live beyond Leighton Buzzard, for example in Northampton, Bedford, Aylesbury, Hemel Hempstead and St Albans.

In the case of the closure before Christmas, it was really quite an easy decision to make as the conditions were appalling. The road conditions were such that too many staff were unable to get into school either being snowed in or stuck in traffic on impassable and dangerous roads. The school site was also unsafe. Today was a more difficult decision, as although the temperature was not as extreme, the school site did have a thick covering of snow. The forecast was also causing more concern with predictions of further heavy snowfall throughout the day on Wednesday. The problem on Thursday 7th January will not only be in clearing the snow and ice on the school site but also the freezing conditions forecast overnight that may make driving to and from school hazardous, not to mention what it will be like on foot around the school site. The site team works incredibly hard to make the site safe. They were at school at 4.30am on Wednesday morning to clear the snow and lay down grit and salt but to no avail.

The current weather conditions are the most severe that I have experienced and I trust parents and guardians will appreciate the difficulties that result from this and recognise that the health and safety of your child and the staff of the school is always the most important consideration.

Thanks to work in establishing our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) all students have work posted electronically which they can all access through their class pages. For example, Y10/11 students preparing for next week's exams can access revision tasks posted on the VLE specifically for them yesterday and all Y9 students have been set a task for BCS. While we continue to develop the VLE and it does not yet cover all subjects, students also know how to access materials on the SAM-Learning website which the school has purchased for

our students to use (this is an excellent source of exercises, activities and tutorials in a wide range of subjects at the full range of levels for students in Years 9-11) and other websites such as BBC Bitesize. For any student who has forgotten his/her log-in details information and a help-line are available on the school website home-page. Students also have their own exercise books, text-books and other materials to use for revision and further study. No student can have any excuse for not getting down to some hard work while away from school.

In the mean time, I hope you will agree that we have to make the best of the situation despite the difficult circumstances. I will continue to keep you informed through the school website, main office answer-phone and local radio stations (Three Counties and Heart) should further extreme weather threaten to disrupt school. In the event that disruption continues into next week when many students in Y11 and the Sixth Form have public exams the school would be open to allow the exams to be held. The examination boards will not make any allowances in these circumstances and the next opportunity to sit these exams is not until the Summer. Further information will be provided for students affected if this becomes necessary.

Yours sincerely
Tim Carroll
Headteacher